PROPOSING A POETICS OF OPPOSITION

IN THE *HAIKAI* OF KOBAYASHI ISSA

by

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A thesis submitted to the faculty of
The University of Utah
in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of

Master of Arts
in
Asian Studies

College of Humanities
The University of Utah
May 2012

The University of Utah Graduate School

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ABSTRACT

Haikai poet Kobayashi Issa (1763-1828) has long been simplistically understood as a modern poet, obscuring the anticanonical aesthetic within his work. In this thesis, the author argues for a poetics of opposition in Issa's work. Through close, comparative readings of Issa and his predecessors, Matsuo Bashō (1644-1694) and Yosa Buson (1716-1783), the author identifies the ways in which Issa's human-centered *haikai* directly oppose conventional aesthetic expectations.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I owe thanks to my husband, Nate Liederbach, for his constant intellectual, emotional, and epicurean support. I would also like to thank the members of my thesis committee, particularly Professor Fusheng Wu, who ushered me into the fascinating world of literary translation. Above all, I would like to thank Professor Emeritus Yukio Kachi, whose guidance and energy have been priceless gifts. This thesis could not have come to fruition without his mentorship.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In 1795, a young *haiku* poet named Kobayashi Yatarō was traveling the western provinces of Japan, meeting poets and studying various regional styles. Though he would become a famous figure in the history of *haiku*, his reputation at the time was modest, and his publications up to this point did not reflect his best work. However, on some miscellaneous journal pages, he jotted a *haiku* which literary scholars would posthumously label as representative of his particular style. In his biography, *Dew on the Grass: The Life and Poetry of Kobayashi Issa*, scholar Makoto Ueda offers a deft translation of the poem:

motainaya hirune shite kiku taueuta
もたいなや昼寝して聞く田うへ唄

(*Issa Haikushū* 30)

this guilty feeling—
napping at midday, I hear
a rice-planting song

(Ueda 5)

Born a farmer's son, Kobayashi would write many poems referencing his ambivalent relationship with farming, particularly his insecurities about having chosen a wandering poet's life over the productive, purposeful life of a farmer in the Northern provinces. This theme

continued throughout his career, even after he had given himself a *haigō* 俳号 (a name used in writing *haiku*) and garnered enough reputation to make a living as a teacher of poetry.

Kobayashi Issa 小林一茶 (1763-1828), as he came to call himself, is now counted among the Three Pillars of *haiku* by all but a handful of scholars, alongside undisputed masters Matsuo Bashō 松尾芭蕉 (1644-1694) and Yosa Buson 与謝蕪村 (1716-1783). However, his dissenters are among the most respected contemporary literary scholars, and two Issa specialists admit that his work falls short of Bashō and Buson, whose distinct aestheticisms have immeasurably enriched the *haiku* genre (Ueda viiii). Scholarly opinion seems to be that Issa's greatest contribution is, as Makoto Ueda puts it: "with his bold individualism and all-embracing humanism, [Issa] helped to modernize the form to a degree matched by no other poet" (Ueda viiii). Commentary on Issa's work inevitably uses language in this vein, simultaneously admiring and apologetic: he is individual, humanist, and modern, but not as aesthetically sophisticated as his predecessors. Ueda continues with an assessment of why Issa may be received with such ambivalence:

> Issa always had an earthly perspective, with a mind that looked at nature from his highly personal point of view. Joy, grief, anger, and all the other emotions were his own, individualized and conveniently distorted. Although he is compared with Bashō and Buson...he seems smaller for that reason….His poetry is lacking in the viewpoint that transcends time and space. (Ueda 4)

This earthly perspective informs Issa's guilt about not becoming a farmer. Rather than transcending his personal conundrum, he lingers in the juxtaposition of his unworthy

self-portrait with the distant, rhythmic sounds of productivity. Bashō, on the other hand, rarely shows such self-absorption, taking pains to excise any personal life from his work. When Bashō appears in his own *haiku*, it is usually as a figure dispersed among the greater figures of his poetic lineage, all of whom possess an ultimately ephemeral presence.

Issa's earthly quality is viewed as a shortcoming among some scholars, but that quality may be the source of his positive popular reception. Popular audiences seem to identify easily with Issa as both a poet and a biographical figure. Popular fascination with Issa is evidenced by the numerous contemporary publications featuring his life, which include award-winning plays, novels, and even a detective series (Ueda x).

His reception in the West has taken a similar trajectory. Though he is frequently translated and anthologized alongside his famous predecessors, relatively little English scholarship exists on Issa's poetics. The first biography to take into account recent Japanese scholarship on Issa, and to reference specific poems, is Ueda's *Dew on the Grass: The Life and Poetry of Kobayashi Issa*, published in 2004. It is the only one of its kind to incorporate significant poetic analysis, though it is primarily a critical biography. Issa's work is also frequently translated for younger audiences as an accessible children's poetry. When Western scholars and poets characterize Issa's work, their assessments are similar to those of their Japanese counterparts, as they frequently label him "modern" and "humanist". However, these labels are often undefined or given only vague parameters, and are rarely supported by close readings, identifying specific

elements which qualify Issa's work for these titles. For Western scholars, who may have limited exposure to modern or classical Japanese, this may be a problem of language. Poets like Robert Hass may express admiration for Issa's style, but lacking a Japanese context, can only engage his work in translation. While Japanese scholars are able to engage the classical texts, it seems common in their field to utilize terms without specific definitions, leaving open the possibility that different Japanese scholars are measuring the poet's "modern" and "humanist" style from varying, intuitive perspectives. Even terms like *yugen* 幽玄 ('elegant simplicity'), or *mono no aware* 物の哀れ ('the pathos of things'), common to scholarly discussions of Japanese aestheticism, seem to be employed with a wealth of implicit definitions and contexts, rather than explicated and methodically applied to a text (Kawamoto xi). Most scholars agree that Issa's work is "modern" and "humanist." Most scholars, even devoted Issa specialists, also agree that his work is inferior to that of Bashō and Buson. These assessments of his work—as modern, humanist, and aesthetically inferior—appear to be based on two implicit dichotomies. The first is a dichotomy between classical and modern literature, which we may picture as a horizontal axis. The second dichotomy is between "high" and "low" poetic diction, which we may picture as a vertical axis. I believe that Issa's reception by contemporary scholars equates "low" poetic diction with "modern" literature, and that these two qualities are implicitly viewed as inferior to "high" poetic diction and classical literature.

Such assessments, however, are both misleading and unproductive for *haiku* scholarship,

leading to the current lack of nuance in theories of Issa's poetics. While the classical-modern and high-low dichotomies are relevant to an assessment of Issa's *haiku*, I believe that emphasis on his supposed "modern" qualities misconstrues his body of work, as well as the development of *haiku* itself. Rather than analyze Issa's poetic style within the modern-classical dichotomy, I propose to view his work as cultivating an oppositional relationship between *ga* 雅 and *zoku* 俗, or "high" and "low" poetic diction. By depicting humans as physically and mentally embedded in the phenomenal world, yet conscious of the poetic significance of the "high" literary past, Issa challenges *haiku* convention, making contemporary human society the form's new foundation, rather than the literary past. Because Issa empowers "low" diction in his work, and utilizes "high" diction as a peripheral supplement, he is received by some scholars as inferior. This perception may discourage scholars from examining Issa's contribution to the broader aesthetic development of *haiku*. Through close readings, I will argue that Issa depicts human figures who struggle with an irreconcilable opposition between literary antiquity and contemporary society. These human-centered *haiku* directly challenge the balance of "high" and "low" in post-Bashō *haiku* convention, refiguring the relationship as oppositional rather than complimentary. Both Issa's value and marginality in the Japanese canon are rooted in this poetics of opposition.

Issa's poetics of opposition are cultivated through his physical and mental depictions of human figures. Issa depicts his human figures as physically oppositional in three ways. First, unlike his predecessors, Issa consistently depicts the human as a direct, explicit physical presence.

Second, Issa depicts the physical human as neither a parody of nor a compliment to "high" poetic tradition. Third, Issa's physical human figures are centralized, and their presence displaces conventional, romantic poetic values to the periphery. Issa also depicts the internal emotional and intellectual state of his human figures, which I will call Issa's mental depictions. These depictions oppose conventional poetics in two key ways. First, Issa depicts himself more frequently than his predecessors, and his mental state is often central to his work's poetic impact. More importantly, Issa's mental depictions are subjective, fallible, and embedded in the contemporary world. Second, these human figures are spiritually, socially, and artistically in conflict with the contemporary and ancient worlds. While his predecessors advocated a poetics which harmonized the two, Issa asserted that poetic value was to be found in their fundamental incompatibility.

Before arguing for a poetics of opposition, however, I will first discuss the development of *haiku*. In Chapter II, I will trace *haiku* from its early, comic manifestations, to its high literary orthodoxy, as defined by Bashō and reinforced by Buson. Using examples from Bashō and Buson, I will argue that post-Bashō scholarly reception is based on two key characteristics: a balance of "high" and "low" diction that remains firmly rooted in antiquity, and a Zen Buddhist sense of the human presence in the phenomenal world. Issa, on the other hand, inverted the conventional relationship between "high" and "low" poetic diction, thereby giving *haiku* a new spiritual and philosophical foundation.

In Chapter III, I will discuss the sociocultural and socioeconomic context in which Issa grew up. This context will shed light on Issa's developing sense of poetics, from his early, imitative tendencies, to his development of a style sharply distinct from that of his literary predecessors. Chapter IV will argue for a nuanced understanding of Issa's poetics. Using close, comparative readings of Issa, Bashō, and Buson, I will argue that Issa cultivated a poetics of embodiment, emphasizing poetry as a human endeavor embedded in the phenomenal world. Unlike his predecessors, who emphasized the superiority of courtly antiquity, and the ephemerality of the phenomenal world, Issa emphasized the "low" or "vulgar" aspects of *haiku* as an enduring practice within the phenomenal world. Within the framework of post-Bashō structural orthodoxy, Issa offered a stylistic counter-weight to Bashō's poetic ideal of "awakening to the high, returning to the low" (Shirane 255). Through human depiction, Issa's poetry challenged the conventional balance of "high" and "low" in post-Bashō *haiku*, placing the vulgar, phenomenal world at the center of his work, and shifting the high elegance of antiquity to *haiku*'s periphery.

In conclusion, I will reiterate that Issa's work is structurally conventional and stylistically innovative. Scholars who characterize Issa as "modern" and "humanist" (and implicitly inferior) ignore his structural conventionality. Additionally, Issa's stylistic departures from convention, though received as "modern," are based in spiritual and philosophical differences which are not inherent to either modern or classical periods. Rather than interpreting Issa within the

classical-modern dichotomy, it is more productive to view him as a poet challenging the conventional balance of "high" and "low" poetic diction. Rather than continuing the poetic tradition of using the "low," phenomenal world as a complimentary supplement to the legacy of "high" antiquity, Issa's poetry insists that the two are oppositional, and that *haiku*'s poetic value can come from physically explicit, emotionally ambivalent verse founded in the contemporary world. This makes for more accurate characterizations of Issa's work, and affirms his work as a particular aesthetic, constructed within a broader poetic context. By proposing a poetics of opposition in the work of Kobayashi Issa, I hope to contribute a more nuanced understanding of the poet to the field of classical poetry, while simultaneously emphasizing that his aesthetic is linked with that of his literary predecessors.

CHAPTER II

DEVELOPMENT OF *HAIKU*

Before examining the development of the form and style, it should be noted that the term *haiku* was invented by poet Masaoka Shiki 正岡子規 (1867-1902), well after the genre's literary status had been established by Bashō, and after it was practiced by Issa. Therefore, to avoid anachronism, I will hereafter refer to *haiku* by its early name: *haikai*, a term whose literal translation suggests the form's humble roots: humorous or vulgar poetry. This chapter explores the development of *haikai* in the context of a dichotomy of *ga* 雅 ('high') and *zoku* 俗 ('low'), literary terms which are also sometimes translated as "elegant" and "vulgar". In the context of haikai, the "high" or "elegant" consists of a rigidly codified set of themes and diction restricted to literary antiquity. The "low" or "vulgar" consists of any sort of contemporary themes or forms of vernacular that were prohibited in older, more serious poetic forms.[1]

While contemporary *haiku* is understood as an independent short poem of 5-7-5 syllable verses, its predecessor, the *haikai 俳諧,* began as a communal linked verse form of

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[1] While "vulgarity," as it is known today, falls under the umbrella of *zoku*, since the term encompasses a much broader spectrum, hereafter I will refer to *zoku* as "low," unless specifically referencing the use of vulgarity as one aspect of this poetic category.

poetry called *renga* 連歌. *Haikai no renga* 俳諧の連歌 was initially a court amusement, popular in the Heian period (794-1185), and composed without the rigorous expectations of higher forms of poetry. Literary scholar Howard Hibbett notes that *renga* was generally composed by a handful of poets, in both formal and informal settings, and sometimes accompanied by high-stakes gambling (79). The basic structure of *haikai no renga* was as follows:

> Haikai…opened with the seventeen-syllable (5/7/5) hokku—which later became the haiku—to which was added a fourteen-syllable (7/7) second verse (*wakiku*), which was capped in turn by a seventeen-syllable (5/7/5) third verse (*daisanku*), and so forth, until a sequence of 36 (*kasen*), 44 (*yoyoshi*), 50 (*gojuin*), 100 (*hyakuin*), or 1,000 verses (*senku*) was completed. (Shirane 6)

In keeping with the emphasis on consistent variation, seasonal and locational references also changed from verse to verse. Most linked-verse poets sought unity in this variety, emphasizing the group's poetic spirit over personal style (Hibbett 80). *Haikai no renga* was developed as a parody of a highly respected poetic genre, the *waka* 和歌. While *waka* was a highly regarded literary art form with rigid restrictions on the use of diction, images, and themes, *haikai no renga* was composed with a playful sense of freedom. According to literary scholar Howard Hibbet, one of the defining components of *haikai no renga* was the juxtaposition of *zoku* ('low'), which was strictly prohibited in *waka*, with *ga* ('high'), the precisely defined themes and diction to which *waka* was restricted (81). *Haikai no renga* differed in two key ways, verse length and diction. First, while *waka* were composed in five segments of 5-7-5-7-7 syllables, the *haikai*

was shorter, with only three segments of 5-7-5 syllables. Second, while *waka* diction was rigidly restricted, *haikai* employed the use of Chinese compounds and readings *kango* 漢語, vulgar diction *zokugo* 俗語, dialects *hogen* 方言, and Buddhist terms *butsugo* 仏語. Each of these falls under the larger umbrella of *haigon* 俳言 ('*haikai* words'), synonymous with the literary term *zoku* 俗 ('low') which encompasses a much broader linguistic and thematic range than the exceedingly prescriptive *kago* 歌語 ('*waka* words'), or the *ga* 雅 ('high') used to denote high literary merit.

Waka developed strict rules regulating poetic diction, with extensive use of prescriptions and prohibitions on an extensive list of topics, diction, and allusion. Particular words or phrases were repeated to varying degrees in *waka*, all of which were considered highly elegant and imbued with particular connotations. The use and misuse of these highly elegant, explicitly *waka* words and phrases depended on whether poets harmonized their usages with the word's *hon'i* 本意, what Kawamoto Koji describes as a the "essential implications" of a particular *waka* word or phrase (2). For example, the term "autumn dusk" developed a strong association with a feeling of forlornness in *waka* poetry. Thus, any poet who violated the forlorn *hon'i* of autumn dusk—either by employing another word with a contradictory *hon'i* , or by the repetitive use of a word with substantially the same *hon'i* —was berated for a lack of poetic skill. The *waka* treatise, *Mumyōshō* 無名抄*,* provides an example of the latter criticism. In it, the poet Shun'e (b. 1113) criticizes the following poem as "superficial" due to its repetitive *hon'i* 本意：

yū sareba	With dusk's onset,
nobe no akikaze	autumn winds on the fields
mi ni shimite	pierce the body.
uzura naku nari	A quail cries out.
fukakusa no sato	Fukakasa Village.

(Kawamoto 4)

Shun'e's criticism is based on the use of *yū* ('[autumn] dusk') and *mi ni shimite* ('pierce the body'). Because "autumn dusk" has firmly established connotations of forlornness, he considers the more direct emotionality of the phrase "pierce the body" both obvious and superfluous (Kawamoto 5). Thus, because the two phrases connote similar *hon'i*, they should not be used in the same poem.

The *hon'i* of *waka* words were so deeply entrenched that it was equally frowned upon to attempt to associate a word with a contradictory implication. The power of *hon'i* in *waka* diction was such that violating it, even in later *haikai*, was considered taboo. For example, five centuries after Shun'e criticized Fujiwara no Shunzei's inattentiveness to the *hon'i* of "autumn dusk," poet Mukai Kyorai (1651-1704) took a fellow poet to task for ignoring the essential meaning of "autumn dusk" in *haikai*. The poet, Fūkoku (d. 1701), composed a verse declaring, "Recently, when I heard the sound of a temple bell in the mountains at dusk, I didn't feel at all forlorn" (in Kawamoto 1). Accusing the poem of lacking refinement, Kyōrai commented, "A 'mountain temple,' 'autumn dusk,' and 'bell at dusk' all epitomize forlornness. To go off on a tangent and say that it is not forlorn to the ear is simply willful" (in Kawamoto 1).

Kyorai's emphasis on the rigidity of *waka* diction's *hon'i,* even within the context of the younger, freer *haikai* genre, reflects the conundrum from which *haikai* poetry grew. As previously mentioned, *haikai* initially began as a casual parlor game, liberation from the formality of *waka*, but its practitioners were nevertheless among the elite. Serious, educated poets, whose *waka* were published in imperial anthologies, participated in *haikai no renga* in order to gain respite from *waka*'s high artistic aspirations. In its earliest stages, *haikai* was intended for pure amusement, and thus was characterized by vulgarity, humor, and witty wordplay, rather than the weighty expectations of *waka* diction and its attendant *hon'i*. Practitioners were free to compose beyond those rigid confines, but only as long as they did so with no ambitions toward making *haikai* a legitimate, respected literary form. Thus, Kyōrai's emphasis on attention to a word's *hon'i* within *haikai* reflects a later development in the genre, in which poets attempted to give *haikai* greater legitimacy.

This attempt at legitimizing *haikai* began in the twelfth century, when practitioners split into two schools of thought: the *ushin* 有心 ('serious' or 'mind-possessing') school advocated adherence to the conventions of more noble poetic forms, while the *mushin* 無心 ('frivolous' or 'mind-lacking') school was devoted to the *haikai* mode, employing humor and wordplay as a major feature (Hibbet 81). Though both schools enjoyed a degree of popularity, *ushin* came to dominate. Serious *renga* poets still practiced in the comic mode on occasion, but the *mushin* school's subordinate position became clear as the *ushin* style was favored in the *Tsukuba Collection*

筑玖波集, the first imperial anthology of *renga*, which appeared in 1356.

The political dominance of serious *haikai* was further cemented in the thirteenth century, when meticulous rules were codified in the *Ōan-shinshiki* 應安新式, a text delineating all aspects of *renga* composition, from seating arrangements to the frequency and distribution of conventional themes and images. For example, in a *hyakuin* 百韻 ('hundred-verse' series), the moon was to be mentioned a total of six times before certain fixed verses in the sequence (Hibbett 82). The *hokku* 発句 ('opening verse') in any sequence was to include both a *kireji* 切字 ('emotive particle') and a lunar calendar-based *kigo* 季語 ('seasonal reference') (Hibbett 82). After codification was endorsed by imperial decree, even comic practitioners tended to use it as a guideline. The power of this codification system was such that contemporary *haiku* poets still adhere to the thirteenth century *haikai* rules.

Though *haikai* poets of the time followed these rules, they were also more willing to break from them. The first *haikai* anthology, called the *Mongrel Tsukuba Collection* (*Inu Tsukubashū* 犬筑玖波集), displays a range of subjects and diction "far beyond the bounds of traditional poetic propriety," (Hibbet 83). The collection's opening verse exemplifies the *haikai* treatment of a classical poetic image: *Saohime* 佐保姫 ('Princess Sao'), the Goddess of Spring, who wears cherry blossoms and a robe of mist:

Kasumi no koromo	The robe of mist
suso wa nurekeri	Is soaked at the hem,

Sao-hime no	Princess Sao,
haru tachinagara	On the first day of spring,
shito o shite	Makes water standing ...

(Hibbett 84)

The first verse introduces a high literary reference to spring, "mist" *kasumi*, while the exclamatory, recollective *keri* provides an emotional emphasis to the image of a soaked hem. But the expected image of Princess Sao which follows takes a vulgar turn with the final five syllables, *shito o shite*, a coarse reference that might be more appropriately translated to "pisses," rather than the relatively tame "makes water." The preceding seven syllables, *haru tachinagara*, set up the surprise of *shito o shite* with a play on words, as *tachinagara* has dual functions: first, as the "beginning" or "opening" of spring, and second, as the physical action of "standing up," as a human would. Such juxtapositions of vulgarity and conventional poetic imagery, along with clever word play, were the signatures of *haikai*, though practitioners varied in their degrees of foray into vulgar territory, and those documented in the *Mongrel Tsukuba Collection* may be the most daring (Shirane 55).

Despite the influence of sociocultural changes on *haikai*, the more vulgar, overtly humorous poetic style eventually lost favor, in part due to the advocacy of established, highly educated poets. After the *Mongrel Tsukuba Collection*, *haikai* practitioners tended to advocate a conservative style closer to the *ushin* school. Arakida Moritake 荒木田守武 (1473-1549) exemplifies this trend. Moritake, a *haikai* poet in his own right, disapproved of *haikai* writers who lacked the proper *renga* training, and discouraged the excessive use of colloquialisms, as well as

breaches of decorum or grammar. He declared that *haikai* should only differ from "true *renga*" in its use of humor (Hibbett 85). By advocating a movement away from the more vulgar aspects of *haikai*, Moritake and other like-minded poets were attempting to give the form a literary weight it had not previously possessed.

It wasn't until the seventeenth century, however, that *haikai* was successfully legitimized. In 1638, in an influential publication of *haikai*-specific rules was published by influential poet Matsunaga Teitoku 松永貞徳 (1571-1653). But like his predecessors, Teitoku considered himself primarily a serious *renga* poet, and his conservative teachings alluded to the uneasy alliance between traditionally trained poets and the rising merchant class whose prosperity and interest fueled the surge in *haikai* popularity (Shirane 230). Teitoku insisted on the use of *haigon* ('*haikai* words'), which were prohibited in *waka*. Teitoku emphasized *haigon* to appeal to a rising popular audience, particularly those with little education (Shirane 56). Beyond the emphasis on *haikai* words, however, Teitoku's approach to the form was highly conservative, much more similar to traditional *waka* than to the bawdy *haikai* of the *Mongrel Tsukuba Collection*. In keeping with this conservative codification, Teitoku criticized and revised some of Mongrel Tsukuba's most celebrated, vulgar verses. Due in large part to Teitoku's conservative leadership, *haikai* became a demanding, well-regulated, well respected art form (Hibbett 86).

Later in the seventeenth century, however, Teitoku's elevation of *haikai* into serious was challenged by a group of relatively unlearned poets, collectively called the Danrin 談林 school,

whose relevance and popularity peaked in the 1670s, due in part to their rebellion against the authority of Teitoku's school:

> The freedoms claimed by these [Danrin] poets…were regarded as extremely daring. Besides permitting themselves certain metrical irregularities, they based many of their verses on a humorous, realistic observation of the world about them—not only of the charms of nature, but also of those of the theater and the brothel quarter, and of all the other facets of city life. (Hibbett 88)

By challenging the metrical and thematic conventions advocated by Teitoku, Danrin poets were not merely returning to the old *mushin* school of *haikai*. Certainly, their use of humor and vulgarity has much in common with the early, parlor-game vein of *haikai*. However, previous manifestations of comical *haikai* were utilized in large part by the literary elite, in response to the restrictiveness of traditional poetic diction, as found in *waka*. Danrin poets, on the other hand, introduced urban elements previously unprecedented in *waka*, which was thematically focused on nature and famous figures of antiquity. Though the Danrin school's popularity peaked and waned, their challenges against Teitoku's conservative authority marked a distinct change toward the style developed by the poet Matsuo Bashō (Hibbett 88). In fact, Bashō began as a Danrin poet, and his poetry incorporates much of what made the Danrin school innovative:

> Danrin taste avoided the stereotyped associations of earlier seventeenth-century *haikai*, in favor of a fresh, spontaneous play of wit and realism. Instead of merely being humorous by vulgarizing traditional poetic materials, the Danrin poets also often reversed the technique of ironic juxtaposition and used an elegant, traditional manner in treating subjects

> which were, by the old standards, hopelessly vulgar. Other Danrin characteristics were its use of a more Chinese vocabulary, of wider, more imaginative links between verses, of a technique of extreme allusive indirection. (Hibbett 88)

It was Bashō's mixing of Danrin-style rebellion, with his ambition to elevate *haikai* to a serious, distinct poetic form, which brought about a new orthodoxy. After centuries of *haikai*'s vacillation between vulgar comedic and serious literary tones, with various schools of thought advocating greater emphasis on elegance or vulgarity, Bashō successfully implemented a balance between the *ga-zoku* ('high'-'low') dichotomy. Though he admired the innovative avenues available to Danrin-style poets, he, like Teitoku, wanted the form to be taken seriously as a poetic practice. Literary scholar Haruo Shirane articulates Bashō's perspective nicely:

> Unlike classical poetry, which sought continuity in and preservation of a highly encoded and limited body of texts, haikai deliberately crossed boundaries, parodying authority and convention and seeking out new frontiers. At the same time, haikai needed, at least in Bashō's view, to forge bonds with the traditional arts, to draw authority and inspiration from the earlier poets of Japan and China, to find a larger philosophical and spiritual base. (Shirane 257)

In other words, the expanded vocabulary of *haikai* and its challenge to authority was not a sufficient foundation for cultivating the form as a legitimate art. To give *haikai* a firm philosophical and spiritual foundation, Bashō developed a poetic ideal of *kōgo kizoku* 高悟帰俗, which Shirane translates as: "awakening to the high, returning to the low" (255):

> "Awakening to the high" (*kogo*) implied spiritual cultivation, a deepened

> awareness of nature and the movement of the cosmos, and a pursuit of the "ancients," the noted poets of the past. "The return to the low" (*kizoku*), by contrast, implied a return to the variegated languages and everyday, material world of seventeenth-century commoners and samurai, to those topics omitted or overlooked by the traditional genres. (Shirane 255)

The "low," for Bashō, was a refreshing lens through which to view the "high," which had long gone stale from centuries of restriction and codification. For Bashō, the novelty of *haikai* "lay not so much in the departure from or rejection of the perceived tradition as in the reworking of established practices and conventions, in creating new counterpoints to the past" (Shirane 5).

Bashō's most famous *haikai* exemplifies this poetic ideal:

furuike ya kawazu tobikomu mizu no oto
古池や蛙飛こむ水のをと
(*Bashō Haikushū* 89)

old pond
a frog jumps in—
sound of water[2]

In addition to the spare, spontaneous nature of the poem, Bashō's most surprising turn comes in the final five syllables, *mizu no oto* 水の音 ('sound of water'). Traditionally, any poetic reference to frogs was inevitably aural. The word *kawazu* 蛙 ('frog') led readers to expect a reference to the frog's croak. Instead, Bashō introduces a new, entirely unexpected aural element

[2] Translations, unless otherwise noted, are my own.

to the poem: the sound of water. This act of allusive misdirection revitalizes the frog as a poetic symbol, while simultaneously infusing the poem with thematic complexity. The allusive misdirection of poems like Bashō's *furuike ya* 古池や ('old pond') manages to create a sense of harmony between these two trajectories, alluding to literary precedent, while reinvigorating the spirit of high cultural tradition with an unexpected shift in poetic diction or theme.

Another key characteristic of Bashō's poetic style is a Zen monk-like nonattachment to the phenomenal world. Bashō's Zen Buddhist aesthetic lends his *haikai* a lean, deliberate voice which decentralizes the human. Of the Three Pillars, he is the most absent from his poetry, the least personally located. The insignificance of the human as both a spiritual and aesthetic figure is visible throughout his work.

Bashō's Zen-influenced *kōgo kizoku* 高悟帰俗 ('awakening to the high, returning to the low') style gained prominence during his lifetime, and was cemented by the second Pillar, Yosa Buson, who revived the *shōfu* 蕉風 ('Bashō style'). A popular painter in his day, Buson was financially comfortable for most of his life, and did not seek the ascetic life as a necessity for cultivating his poetic style. Instead, Buson's ascetic reflects a visual richness, along with nostalgic admiration for courtly antiquity. Buson was particularly an admirer of Bashō's *haikai*, but his work does not possess the ascetic quality of Bashō's. Instead, he employs a similar mix of Danrin-style innovations with high-brow themes, taking Bashō's cue and removing *haikai* from the humorous realm in favor of high literary goals. Buson's decision to follow Bashō's cue in

turning *haikai* into a high literary form—freer in diction than *waka*, but maintaining similar goals of elegance and beauty—reflects an important change in post-Bashō conventions. After the ascendance of Bashō orthodoxy, poets thereafter rejected the form's comic roots. Issa was the only successful poet who maintained a comic element (Hibbett 83).

The following *haikai* offers a good example of Issa's use of "low" diction, and is surely an allusion to the Mongrel Tsukuba's vulgar portrait of Princess Sao:

sao hime no bari ya koboshite saku sumire
サホ姫のばりやこぼしてさく菫

(Tōta, 202)

Princess Sao's
piss! it spills
and blooms violets

Using the same explicit bodily reference to urination, Issa undermines the high poetic associations of Princess Sao. Clearly, Issa saw himself as a part of the broader *haikai* lineage, and this poem is a nod to its roots as a form of parody. However, unlike the Mongrel Tsukuba's poem, Issa's is not purely comical in nature. The final line is a surprising shift away from the strict comic vulgarity of urination. The middle seven syllables begin with exclamatory emphasis on Princess Sao's *bari* ('piss'), with the particle *ya* adding exclamation to an already startling image. The exclamation is followed by *koboshite/ saku sumire* こぼして/ さく菫 ('it spills/ and blooms violets'). The continuative *te* conjugation of *koboshite* ('spills') holds a sequential sense of time, an anticipation of something to follow the vulgar overflow. What follows is a cluster of violets, their

blooms growing out of the spilled "piss." The violet, while not ubiquitous in *waka,* has some precedent. Two *waka* which reference the *sumire* ('violet'), the first of which was written by Yamabe no Akahito (700 - 740):

haru no no ni sumire tsumi ni to koshi ware zo no o natsukashimi hitoyo ne ni keru
春の野に菫摘みにと来し我ぞ野をなつかしみ一夜宿にける
(*Nihon Koten Bungaku Taikei* v. 5. 285)

to this spring field
I came to pick violets.
charmed by the field,
I ended up staying overnight[3]

The poem was later referenced by hermit poet Kinoshita Chōshōshi (1569-1649), who found a kinship with Akahito through their mutual experience with violets:

hakone yama usumurasaki no tsubosumire futa shio mi shio tare ka some ken
箱根山薄紫のつぼすみれ二しほ三しほたれかそめけん
(*Nihon Koten Bungaku Taikei* v. 5. 285)

Mountains of Hakone
pale purple violets
two dips or three
who could've dyed them?[4]

Though not as common in *waka* as the iconic cherry blossom, violets had been the subject of these notable poems, and thus gained a level of acceptance as "high" diction. Basho, well-educated in the *waka* tradition, wrote the following with these previous poems in mind:

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3 Translated with input from Professor Yukio Kachi.

4 Translated by Professor Yukio Kachi.

yamaji kite nani yara yukashi sumiregusa
山路来て何やらゆかしすみれ草

(*Bashō Haikushū* 283)

coming to a mountain path
what is it that pulls me so?
field violets

The poem possesses a delighted quality about the natural world, and without knowing its intertextual elements, it can be appreciated purely as a nature poem. This is frequently the way Bashō's work is read in translation in the West. However, Bashō is equally delighted with his unexpected encounter with literary legacy. The pleasure of encountering these small, lovely violets, for Bashō, is given poetic heft by the symbolic value of violets, which elicit a spontaneous sense of camaraderie with past literary figures. All three figures are surprised by these common but inexplicably alluring wildflowers, and their collective experience raises the small, mundane flower to a level of "high" poetic diction. The poem exemplifies the ideal of "awakening to the high, returning to the low," rediscovering high antiquity through a rustic, contemporary context.

Issa's poem differs from Bashō's in two ways. First, its overtly vulgar parody of Princess Sao harks back to *haikai* as a comic practice. But by creating a causal relationship between ignominious bodily functions and the poetic bloom of violets, Issa seems to be asserting a shift in the "high"-"low" dialectic. Both Basho and Issa incorporate the requisite surprise that comes with a mingling of "high" and "low" diction, but the way in which the two elements mingle

differently with each poet. Basho's spontaneous violets experience is a compliment to the "high" literary past. Issa, on the other hand, takes the comic image of the "high" princess in the "low" act of urinating, and creates something new, a poetic sensibility jarringly steeped in the vernacular, and in the contemporary experience.

The previous *haikai* exemplifies the vulgarity that scholars often view as central to Issa's poetry. Indeed, Princess Sao's urination is at the poem's center. Thus it is easy to overlook an analysis of the relationship between *bari* ばり ('piss') and *sumire* 菫 ('violets'). It is precisely the relationship between "high" and "low" diction which I aim to focus on throughout this thesis.

In the subsequent chapters, I will argue that Issa's use of "low" poetic diction—originally associated with casual, comedic practice—reflects a challenge to Bashō's ideal of "awakening to the high, returning to the low." While Issa, like Bashō, viewed both sides of the dichotomy as essential to *haikai,* he implicitly argued for greater emphasis on the form's so-called "low" diction as a source of genuine poetic inspiration, rather than merely a revitalizing context for the elegant literary past. Issa found the "low" in contemporary human experiences, embedded in the phenomenal world, but acutely aware of the "high" literary past. By inverting the power of one in favor of the other, Issa posits a poetics of opposition that constitutes a significant aesthetic deviation from *haikai* convention.

CHAPTER III

ISSA: EARLY STAGES

Because Issa's sociocultural background plays a role in the formation of his *haikai* style, this chapter will explore his early development as a poet and biographical figure. In particular, a brief summary of Issa's biographical differences from his major predecessors, Bashō and Buson, will also provide the foundation for my argument on Issa as a poet who deliberately undermined high poetic tradition with the contemporary themes and diction of a rising social class.

Issa was born on June 15, 1763, in the town of Kashiwabara, Shinano province.[5] Kashiwabara was a small farming town 150 miles northwest of the capitol city of Edo. A highway connected Kashiwabara and Edo, insuring that, despite its harsh winters and largely farming community, the town also stood as a waypoint for commercial travelers and Daimyō 大名, feudal lords who traveled to the capitol as part of the Shogunate's *sankin kōtai* 参勤交代 ('alternate attendance') system, which required lords to maintain residences in both the capitol and their home regions (Totman 220). This system of feudal regulation, combined with commercial travelers, added another element to Kashiwabara's economic and social significance.

[5] Modern day Nagano Province.

Despite its status as a stopover for feudal and commercial travelers, Kashiwabara was primarily a small farming town, plagued by high altitude, poor soil, and harsh winters (Ueda 5). Because farmers were subject to taxes levied by the samurai class, even relatively comfortable families, like Issa's, were often forced to send their children to work in Edo while their parents took on part time work for passing travelers (Ueda 6).

The financial and geographical difficulties borne by Issa's family were compounded when his mother died in 1765, when Issa was only two years old. Issa's father, Kobayashi Yagobei, remarried in 1770, and his second wife gave birth to a second son in 1772. Issa's accounts of his childhood paint a strained relationship with his step-family, mediated only by his grandmother, who died in 1776, resulting in an escalation of domestic tensions. Along with financial need, this tension between Issa and his stepmother is one likely reason that Yagobei sent his son away to Edo the following spring, when Issa was 14 years old. Poor children who, like Issa, were sent to Edo to work, were often nicknamed "gray starlings" for their unkempt appearance and their tendency to arrive in flocks (Ueda 9).

Later in life, Issa wrote a great deal about his childhood and adult tensions with his in-laws and residents of Kashiwabara, but relatively little about his first years in Edo. In one rare exception, he wrote the following in one of his many diaries:

> Like a pitiful bird without its nest, I immediately faced the difficulty of finding a place to sleep. One night I would take shelter from dew under the eaves of one house; another night I would seek protection from frost in the shade of another

> house. One day I would wander into an unknown forest and call out at the top of my voice, but with no one except a lonely wind among the pines responding to me, I would make a bed out of tree leaves and go to sleep there…I spent days and months under miserable circumstances like these, until by chance I came to learn the art of humorous, country-style haikai. (Ueda 10)

Though this excerpt shows an emotional hyperbole typical of Issa's later style, it is likely that he experienced genuine hardship when first arriving in the strange urban setting, as Edo natives were suffering from high unemployment in the year of his arrival. The shortage of opportunities in the capitol were such that, in June 1777, just a few months after Issa's departure from Kashiwabara, a government ordinance was issued prohibiting farmers of nearby provinces to work in Edo (Ueda 10). Luckily, Issa was literate, unlike many other "gray starlings," which allowed him to break into the world of *haikai*. In the passage above, Issa seems to suggest that his discovery of *haikai* was both a pragmatic and spiritual turning point, which alleviated loneliness and gave him the means to clothe and house himself. *Haikai* masters at the time were accorded low social status, but the more adept practitioners were able to make a living out of correcting student verses, leading *renku* compositions, and teaching tours of outer towns and villages (Ueda 11). To an even greater extent than in the era of the Tsukuba Collection, sociocultural changes in the late-Edo period were shaping both the membership of poetry circles and the practice itself.

At the time, Edo-based *haikai* masters generally fell into one of two schools. The dominant aesthetic was that of the Edo school, which advocated urbane, sophisticated themes

and styles (Ueda 11). The Katsushika school, on the other hand, promoted a more rustic style. Founded by a friend of Bashō's, the Katsushika school was comprised mostly of residents of the more rustic eastern Edo. Because he used a variety of different *haigō* 俳号 ('*haikai* name') in his early Edo days, it is unclear when Issa began to apprentice as a *haikai* poet, but he first appears as "Issa" in 1787, in a collection of poetry titled *Grains of Sand*. His single entry in the collection is a *haikai* of stereotypical imagery and diction, but is signed "Issa, a scribe of the Ihin Hut" (Ueda 12). The Ihin Hut belonged to the head of the Katsushika school. A master's scribe, Issa could have been practicing *haikai* for years before his first entry, or he could have been largely a live in servant who occasionally participated in *haikai*, but his affiliation with the rustic school is clear. He is recorded as an official member in 1790 (Ueda 13). Issa subsequently moved to the house of another Katsushika master, Chikua, who unconventionally exhorted a student to "Never learn from the haikai of other poets. Learn how to write your own haikai" (Ueda 13). In another unconventional move, Chikua allowed Issa to simultaneously work with another Katsushika master, named Genmu, a retired samurai who devoted the rest of his life to verse writing and eventually became a Zen monk. Both Chikua and Genmu appeared to have faith in Issa's abilities, since Chikua left Issa the Ihin Hut upon his death, and Genmu published numerous *haikai* by Issa in 1788 and 1789.

Though much of Issa's work at this time consists of little more than displays of wit, Issa's growing awareness of literary precedent is evidenced by intertextual references, such as the

following *haikai*:

kisagata mo kyo wa uramazu hana no haru
象潟もけふは恨まず花の春

(*Issa Haikushū* 12)

Kisagata today
does not look so sorrowful
this flowering spring

(Ueda 14)

Kisagata, a scenic bay off the Sea of Japan, is an *utamakura* 歌枕, a famous literary location with a rich history of references stretching back to the tenth century *Collection of Ancient and Modern Poems (Kokinshu* 古今集). This practice of referencing famous literary places was continued by Bashō in a *haibun* from his famous travel journal, translated by Donald Keene as *The Narrow Road to Oku* (*Oku no Hosomichi* 奥の細道). Upon visiting the area, Bashō writes: "Matsushima seems to be smiling, but Kisakata wears a look of grief[6]" (Keene, *The Narrow Road to Oku* 123). Issa's poem seems to respond directly to Bashō's *haibun* in a playful, Katsushika style, countering Bashō's somber depiction with a more cheerful one. His intertextual reference suggests that, while he may not have had the same level of access to classical texts as either Bashō or Buson, he was quickly learning the rules of literary allusion, and the ways in which to subvert those rules with humor.

After Chikua's death in 1790, Issa returned to apprentice under Somaru, continuing his

[6] *Matsushima wa warau ga gotoku, kisakata wa uramu ga gotoshi..*
松島は笑ふが如く、象潟はうらむがごとし。

modest gains in visibility among *haikai* circles. He appears in five different *haikai* books that year, and while still un-extraordinary, some of the publications hinted at his later skill at combining humor with insight:

sanmon ga kasumi minikeri tōmegane
三文が霞見にけり遠眼鏡

(*Issa Haikushū* 12)

three pennies' worth
of haze—that's all I see
through this telescope

(Ueda 16)

The verse refers to a telescope atop Yushima Hill, overlooking Edo's Ueno and Asakura districts (Ueda 17). With the collision of a classical poetic reference to *kasumi* 霞 ('mist'), and objects of urban commerce—*sanmon* 三文 ('three pennies') and *tomegane* 遠眼鏡 ('telescope') —Issa demonstrates a satirical insight. Still, he was a mere disciple, and much of his work was imitative. Moreover, he had never traveled along the Tōkaido road, a practice considered necessary for *haikai* mastery. Determined to take on the mantle of wandering poet, Issa began planning his trip to the west. Before setting out on his poetic journey, Issa returned to Kashiwabara to visit his family for the first time in fifteen years (Ueda 19).

Along the way, he detoured to visit other sights and poets, and from this journey came Issa's oldest preserved diary, in which he declares his *haibun*, calling himself "Issa the monk." The name strongly connotes a Buddhist sensibility about the transience of things, a quality that

defines the work of Bashō, and to a lesser extent Buson. However, Issa's departure from the aesthetic sensibility of Bashō's Zen *haikai* are expressed in a passage from this diary, written in honor of a contemporary poet upon the completion of his new dwelling. The passage begins as a respectful echo of Bashō's famous work, *The Unreal Dwelling* (*Genjuan no Ki* 幻住庵の記), but swiftly turns darker, more conflicted:

> I am one of those people who have eyes like a dog's and ears like a horse's. At the year's first snowfall, instead of praising the beauty of the day I would complain what terrible things have come down from the sky. When the cuckoo's cry fills the night with poetry, I would whine and say how noisy the bird is. Whether the moon is full or the blossoms are in bloom, all I do is lie down idly on my back. I might be called a sinner against scenic beauty.
>
> | | |
> |---|---|
> | *hasu no hana* | lotus flowers |
> | *shirami wo sutsuru* | and yet, picking lice |
> | *bakari nari* | is all I do |
>
> (Ueda 23)

Issa's *haibun* is simultaneously a tribute to and a subversion of Bashō's aesthetic. He distinctly echoes Bashō's *Unreal Dwelling*, as Bashō also depicted himself picking lice in his hut. However, by equating his senses with those of animals, he is alluding to Bashō's exhortation to admire the poetic beauty of flowers or be considered a mere beast (in Ueda 23). And like an unsophisticated beast, Issa is a sinner lying on his back, enjoying the idleness of his own body. As Ueda puts it, Issa's self-declaration as a sinner against scenic beauty hints at a poetics different from Bashō's, "a poetics that is still to be worked out" (23).

Though Issa's poetics are still in early stages in this passage, he already demonstrates an

awareness of the power of self-depiction. In the previous passage, Issa depicts himself physically, "lying idly on my back," his body's spiritual statement clashing with the classical beauty of the full moon and flowers in bloom. The image of Issa lying on his back can be seen as vulgar, while the moon and blossoms are classical images of refinement. This juxtaposition of "high" and "low" is consistent with *haikai*'s original impetus, which was to introduce vulgar or vernacular elements into poetry as a means to reinvigorate classical images of refinement, which had become stale over time.

Issa composed the passage to recount a visit to poet Nizaemon, who had recently built a house in a scenic spot (Ueda 23). Issa's humble depiction of himself as a mere animal among such beautiful, enlightening scenery may be interpreted as typical protocol for the social occasion. To honor Nizaemon, Issa humbles himself in the poem, depicting an animalistic creature in the prone position. His humble depiction may also be in honor of Bashō, whom he echoes heavily throughout the piece.

Still, Issa's emphasis on his physical and psychological inferiority to Nizaemon and Bashō are striking for two reasons. First, Issa's self-depiction is startling when compared with Bashō's own humbleness, as this long excerpt from his *haibun*, *The Unreal Dwelling*, reveals:

> My body, now close to fifty years of age, has become an old tree that bears bitter peaches, a snail which has lost its shell, a bagworm separated from its bag; it drifts with the winds and clouds that know no destination. Morning and night I have eaten traveler's fare, and have held out for alms a pilgrim's wallet. On my last journey my face was burnt by the sun of Matsushima, and I wetted my

> sleeve at the holy mountain...Then I bruised my heels along the rough coast of the northern sea, where each step in the sand dunes is painful. This year I roamed by the shores of the lake in quest of a place to stay, a single stalk of reed where the floating nest of the grebe might be borne to rest by the current. This is my Unreal Dwelling, and it stands by the mountain called Kokubu. An ancient shrine is near, which so purifies my senses that I feel cleansed of the dust of the world. This abandoned thatched hut was where the uncle of the warrior Suganuma retreated from the world. He went away some eight years ago; his dwelling remains behind at these crossroads of unreality. Indeed it is true that all the delusions of the senses are summed up in the one word *unreality*, and there is no way to forget even for a moment change and its swiftness. (Keene, *Anthology of Japanese Literature* 376)

Like the images of nature and references to the passage of time, Bashō's emotional and physical distress is utilized to emphasize the unreality of all things. When Bashō depicts his physical fragility, he does so through images of nature: an old tree, a shell-less snail, a naked worm. Bashō describes his face as burnt by the Matsushima sun, emphasizing location over human features, and upon visiting the holy mountain, Bashō is so moved that "I wetted my sleeve," a classic reference which displaces human emotion onto clothing, with wetness implying tears. Bashō's physical and psychological self-depiction becomes one more dispersed element of unreality, of the "dust of the world" of which he attempts to cleanse himself.

In contrast, Issa inverts this depiction. In his *haibun*, classical poetic images of "high" beauty come and go, but the emotional and physical human remains, sinfully sprawled, intent on the pragmatics of lice-picking rather than the beauty of lotus flowers. This inverted depiction shows the beginnings of Issa's tendency to centralize the psychological and physical presence of the contemporary human.

Issa's second striking departure has to do with his balance of "high" and "low." By depicting himself in tension with "high" poetic images of beauty—the first snowfall, the cuckoo's cry, the full moon, and flowers in bloom—Issa places heavier emphasis on the "low" elements of this *haibun*. Rather than merely using commonplace, contemporary images to reinvigorate classic images of beauty, he lingers in the "low," closing his *haibun* with: "and yet, picking lice/ is all I do." As a complaining, whining, and idly reclining poet-figure, Issa presents a surprising response to "high" poetic diction, one that seems to be neither merely humble nor comical. Like Bashō, Issa begins to make his own claims about poetry when he depicts himself picking lice, indifferent to the moon and flowers.

Still, at this stage, Issa was narrowly tutored, and largely untraveled, a hindrance to his ambitions to become one among a tradition of wandering poets. After returning to Edo, Issa made preparations to embark on a journey to Kyoto, the most important center for traditional arts, such as poetry. In 1791, he embarked on an eight-year-long voyage, traveling to Kyoto and beyond, deeper into the West, on to Shikoku, and well into Kyushu. His travels had a marked influence on his poetic style, as he increasingly moved away from classical allusions and wordplay, and incorporated a wider variety of *haikai* styles. Among these styles was that of the Buson-influenced Tenmei school, which was characterized by heightened aestheticism, and aspiration for types of beauty far removed from mundane reality (Ueda 30). Issa's active experimentation with a wide variety of styles during this time suggests an awareness of the

broader historical and regional poetry trends, as well as an ambition to create his own distinct style, using elements of other styles which he encountered during his travels. As Ueda notes:

> Life on the road had begun to change Issa as a poet. One such change was that Issa had begun writing more *hokku* from personal experience and observation rather than from imagination. Day by day the journey brought plenty of new subject matter for him to draw on, reducing the need for poetic invention. The result was more spontaneous poetry describing actual scenes and experiences in plain language. (Ueda 29)

Through his travels, Issa was exposed to a broader range of poetic styles, regional cultures, and dialects than either Bashō or Buson. Issa's experimentation with these different styles is evidenced in the two *haikai* collections he published during this time. The sudden broadening of Issa's life experiences, in combination with his expanding stylistic repertoire, led to a present-minded *haikai* style which observed the curiosities of daily life, and increasingly challenged Bashō's emphasis on reinvigorating "high" imagery and diction.

CHAPTER IV

POETICS OF OPPOSITION

Overview

Issa's human-inhabited *haikai* deviate from the standard set by Bashō, and continued by Buson. Physically and mentally embedded in the phenomenal world, Issa's humans express opposition to both their contemporaries and to the world of "high" literary antiquity. Issa creates this opposition in two key ways. First, he depicts humans as physically explicit, their bodies posed in tension with their social and literary context. When depicting humans, Bashō and Buson frequently evoke the human body through symbolism or allusion. Issa, on the other hand, depicts humans directly, frequently making them central figures with a tangible, often vulgarly commonplace physical presence. In addition to making the human body explicit, Issa also depicts the physical body resisting social and literary expectations..

Issa's human figures also tend to inhabit the contemporary world, rather than the deeply intertextual literary-historical context which both Bashō and Buson draw upon. This is not to say that Issa's *haikai* lack any relationship to the literary past. However, his relationship to antiquity varies significantly from post-Bashō orthodoxy. Bashō emphasized antiquity as *haikai*'s spiritual

and philosophical foundation. Issa, on the other hand, depicts antiquity at the periphery, utilizing *waka* words and intertextuality less frequently and with less force than his predecessors. While Issa's *haikai* recollect the high, it is the low to which they awaken, by means of the physical body.

Second, humans in Issa's poetry are not only physically, but mentally present in the contemporary world. Bashō and Buson, even when depicting scenes from contemporary society, rarely depict the intellectual and emotional life of those figures. When they do so, it is usually in terms of literary legacy, as the contemporary human psychology serves to reinvigorate stale tropes from classical poetic forms. Issa, on the other hand, depicts humans both physically and mentally engaged in the contemporary world. Even when Issa's humans contemplate "the ancients," they do so with a deep sense of ambivalence, conflicting with the past rather than creating a foundation for its renewed appreciation. By depicting humans as mentally embedded in the contemporary world, and in conflict with antiquity, Issa cultivates a poetics of opposition, posing the conflicted, incompatible human as *haikai*'s new foundation. Issa's human *haikai* reflect individual psychologies that feel a range of emotions, often clashing with the contemporary and ancient world, unlike Bashō and Buson, whose figures, when depicted psychologically, psychologically harmonize with the past, making the past and present complimentary.

By employing a poetics of opposition, through physically and mentally ambivalent human depictions, Issa challenges *haikai*'s post-Bashō balance of high and low, giving the form a new spiritual and philosophical foundation. Rather than basing *haikai*'s literary respectability in

past traditions, Issa builds upon a contemporary foundation, with all its inescapable physical and psychological weight.

Though the three each have distinguishable aesthetics, Issa's aesthetic likely favors the contemporary, embodied human context for two reasons. The first reason in based in Issa's sociocultural background. As a farmer's son, Issa had limited access to the education and social networks which gave Bashō and Buson the resources to draw upon canonical texts. It was important for poets to make skillful allusions to ancient Japanese and Chinese texts. Yet Issa, literate and well-educated for his class, had relatively little knowledge of classical texts. Despite his lack of education, in his early years, Issa attempted the kind of conventional literary allusions that were expected of serious poets. However, as he grew more experienced and well-traveled, he began to draw increasingly upon his contemporary world, writing *haikai* which featured the personal and social conundrums relevant to a broader audience, one which need not draw upon the intertextual knowledge demanded by his predecessors.

Another reason for Issa's distinct focus on the human world is his religious background. Bashō's *haikai* draw upon the Zen Buddhist principle of nonattachment, the desire to "cast off the confines of this world and enter directly and immediately into the truth" (Tamura 116). Buddhist scholar Yoshio Tamura claims, however, that "for all their religious suggestiveness, the guiding concepts of the arts of medieval Japan…were primarily aesthetic principles, though they might achieve their goal by an apparent denial of beauty and elegance" (116). Thus, religious and

spiritual belief systems, particularly Zen Buddhism, constituted an aesthetic strategy, where performance of religiosity became an aspect of poetic expression (Keene, "Japanese Aesthetics" 297). As we will see in comparative readings, Bashō and Buson utilize Zen concepts as aesthetic principles, exhibiting a poetic sensibility that emphasizes nonattachment to the phenomenal world in which humans live.

Conversely, Issa was a Pure Land Buddhist, in which devotees aspire for rebirth in the Pure Land of Amida (Tamura 79). Most manifestations of Pure Land Buddhism view the world in a period of *mappō* 末法 ('Decay of the Law'), in which people have limited capacities for reaching the Pure Land (Tamura 85). Therefore, practices for reaching salvation were simple, accessible even to commoners who were often illiterate, most of their time occupied by the work of survival. Pure Land practitioners had only to recite the *nenbutsu* mantra, "*Namu Amida Butsu*," or "I take refuge in Amida Buddha" (Tamura 80). Unlike Zen Buddhism, which demanded intense scholarship through a master-disciple relationship, and a rejection of the phenomenal world in which one lived, Pure Land Buddhism was a practice that could be incorporated into the lives of commoners who had neither the educational nor financial means to reject reality. Issa approached poetry through this more pragmatic, individualistic Pure Land philosophy. As an ambitious man with an incomplete knowledge of classical literature, determined to utilize his own resources, he imbued his work with a lively and immediate human context.

Thus, Issa frequently portrays humans in his work, giving them tangible physical form

and psychological context. More importantly, these human portrayals emphasize the mundane, vulgar, unclean, or unrefined aspects of the human condition. However, unlike Bashō, these "low" embodiments do not serve primarily to reinvigorate existing aesthetics of Japanese poetry. Rather, by making the embodied human central to his *haikai*, Issa inverts the traditional balance of "high" and "low." Instead of using vulgar images and lexicon to give traditional *waka* diction a new vitality, Issa uses the heightened aesthetic cues of classical poetry to emphasize the richness of contemporary human life in the phenomenal world. Throughout this chapter, I'll examine the ways in which Issa depicts humans as physically and mentally in opposition to antiquity, giving their contemporary presence greater weight than the literary context in which they are written.

Physical Depiction

As noted in the previous chapter, Issa seems conscious of the prone body as a material presence, often symbolizing idleness and excess. He employs a depiction of his own body in physical opposition to the beauty of classical poetic images, with their elegant *hon'i*. His self-depiction is more than a humble counterbalance for classical, dehumanized beauty. Nor is his depiction of himself in the prone position accidental. Many of Issa's *haikai* depict the poet's body as a central, indelible figure which displaces the dominance of classical poetic beauty to the poem's periphery. In its place, Issa depicts an ambivalent human perspective embedded in the contemporary moment. In his journal describing his visit to Nizaemon's scenic home, Issa's

ambivalence is expressed in the human body, while his psychological response reflects a simultaneous admiration for Nizaemon's home and an inability to embrace its isolation as a space for enlightenment.

Similarly, one of Issa's most famous poems, cited earlier, uses physical self-depiction as a means to express a deep, personal ambivalence about the nature of human existence:

motainaya hirune shite kiku taueuta
もたいなや昼寝して聞く田うへ唄

(*Issa Haikushū* 30)

this guilty feeling—
napping at midday, I hear
a rice-planting song

(Ueda 5)

Just as he depicts himself "lying idly" as Bashō's flowers bloom, here Issa depicts himself napping at noon, a guilty practice in idleness, even as he hears the rhythm of productivity, a rhythm which he rejected in favor of poetry. Ueda characterizes this *haikai* as one of many which express Issa's complex about his life choices, and while that may be a factor, it is also important to recognize the way in which Issa chooses to portray such a complex. The poet is centralized in an idle physical body, the body awoken by farmers singing of their productivity. In depicting this scene, he may also have been thinking of this Bashō *haikai*:

fūryū no hajime ya oku no taue uta
風流の初めやおくの田植うた

(*Bashō Haikushū* 170)

beginnings of artistry—
the interior region's
rice planting songs

(Kawamoto 51)

Bashō uses the rice planting songs to reinvigorate the concept of *fūryū* 風流 ('artistry'), the elegance and refinement so valued by classical poets, a term with the same connotations as the "high" *waka* diction. Thus, the opening and closing five syllables create a surprising but complimentary pair. Issa, on the other hand, places the physically embodied poet in tension with the rice planting song, emphasizing the conflict with もたいなや *motainaya* ('this guilty feeling'), a colloquial expression of guilt at having the luxury to nap while others are working to plant rice which he may one day eat. His physical self-depiction also suggests the rice planters as similarly embodied, their rhythmic voices alluding to physical exertion. Where Bashō depicts the farmers as an aural presence, Issa's primary source of guilt is the tension between his idle poet's body and the active farmers, their bodies bending and straightening as they sing. Issa's poem lacks the surprising turn which Bashō offers, but through embodiment, he manages to complicate the broad symbolic value of poetry by placing it in a physical context. Simultaneously, he evokes a sense of subjectivity by referring to his own complicated relationship with two opposing worlds, poetry and farming.

The reoccurrence of the prone body in Issa's poetry also frequently implies a perspectival shift that psychically inverts the conventional balance of high and low poetic diction. In another *haikai*, Issa takes the opportunity to portray himself in illness. Bedridden, he writes:

Star Festival while ill 七夕病中:

utsukushi ya shōji no ana no ama no gawa
うつくしやしゃうじの穴の天の川

(*Issa Haikushū* 189)

how beautiful!
a hole in the *shōji*—
River of Stars

Here, context provides an implied physical depiction, as Issa's focus becomes the unexpected beauty of his vantage point. He notices a hole in the sliding screen, and beyond it the Milky Way. The *haikai* evokes both an image of internal, human spaces, and external, celestial spaces. Both Bashō and Buson wrote *haikai* which present a similar juxtaposition between internal and external spaces. Bashō's is a rare self-portraiture that finds the poet looking into a mirror during illness:

kami haete yougan aoshi satsuki ame
髪はえて容顔蒼し五月雨

(*Bashō Haikushū* 99)

face blue
hair grown long—
summer rains

In Bashō's *haikai*, the external and internal scenes are complementary. Though his face is ostensibly the focus of Bashō's observation, the early summer rains, and the heavy, damp heat of the season are reflected in his pathetic physical condition. His blue face and long hair, the result of sickness, are compounded by the external scene pressing in on Bashō's self-examination. Bashō rarely offers physical self-depiction, so this is something of a stylistic departure, but like his rice planting *haikai*, his tendency here is to offer subtle, complementary juxtapositions of internal and external worlds. His illness and the season are presented without the kind of explicit emotion frequently introduced by Issa. In Issa's rice planting *haikai*, he introduces a psychological dilemma with *motainaya* もたいなや ('this guilty feeling'), while his sickbed *haikai* begins with the exclamatory *utsukushiya* うつくしや ('how beautiful!'). The latter is a surprisingly positive psychological depiction juxtaposed with his prone illness.

Similarly, Buson presents readers with an implied prone body in the following *haikai*:

sashinuki wo ashi de nugu yo ya oborozuki
さしぬきを足でぬぐ夜や朧月

(*Buson Haikushū* 21)

removing *hakama*
with one's feet in evening—
the hazy moon

This *haikai*, like many of Buson's, conjures up the romance of classical literature, specifically the *Tale of Genji* (*Genji Monogatari* 源氏物語). An admiring Buson looks in on the

courtly world, envisioning a man returning from an aristocratic party, no doubt filled with displays of poetic prowess common to Heian culture. The *haikai* then broadens into the night sky, to a moon also obscured by a haze, as the figure and the celestial body form an image similar to a painting of Heian-era palace. The *haikai* exemplifies Buson's heightened aesthetic sensibility, depicting beauty on a grand scale, and emphasizing courtly figures of antiquity. The body depicted is unnamed, probably a courtly figure home from an evening of wine and poetry. Buson's depiction of the figure lazily kicking off his *hakama* is infused with none of the guilt and ambivalence of Issa's rice planting *haikai*, partly due to the perspectival depiction. In Issa's poem, the poet is the prone figure, while Buson's *haikai* observes the hazy moon and the courtly figure from a distance.

Issa's use of physical embodiment, while not entirely new, is distinct from the work of his predecessors. Issa limits and personalizes the poetic observer through the prone body, creating an oppositional relationship between classical poetic beauty and the increasingly diverse contemporary social world.

However, not all of Issa's depictions of the prone body suggest psychological ambivalence. On the contrary, the following *haikai* celebrate the prone body:

nesobette funzorikaette hoshi mukae
寝聳てふんぞりかへって星迎

(*Issa Haikushu* 48)

laying down
turning onto my back
to welcome the stars

dai no ji ni nete mitari keri kumo no mine
大の字に寝て見たりけり雲の峰

(*Issa Haikushu* 259)

shaped like the letter *dai*
laying and looking up—
ridge of clouds

Rather than using the prone body to bring ambivalence to poetically romanticized images of rice planting and the night sky, Issa exaggerates the physical pleasures of idleness by exaggerating the body itself. In the first *haikai*, his use of *nesobette* 寝聳て ('lying down') and *funzorikaette* ふんぞりかへって ('turning onto my back') doubly emphasizes the prone position. By repeating variations on the same horizontal state, Issa insists on the body's lowly position. The body replicates the act of lying down, first on the stomach, then on the back. Once turned onto his back, Issa greets the stars, looking up at the expansive sky even as his body, in its repeating turning, insists on contact with the ground. Like Buson's depiction of the anonymous figure, this *haikai* has a loose, carefree air about it, and a shift from individual body to broad celestial vision. Both *haikai* also invoke *waka* diction: *oborozuki* 朧月 ('hazy moon') in Buson's case, *hoshi* 星('stars') and *kumo no mine* 雲の峰 ('ridge of clouds') in Issa's case. But while Buson's *haikai* depicts antiquity with a distant, romantic eye, Issa's *haikai* offers a perspectival shift that is tethered to the present, human context, linking the observed beauty of

the night sky, with all its "high" connotations, to the "low" perspective of the poet's sprawled body.

Issa uses nearly identical language in the following, more somber *haikai*:

dai no ji ni nete suzushisayo sabishisayo
大の字に寝て涼しさよ淋しさよ

(*Issa Haikushū* 184)

shaped like the letter *dai*
the coolness of lying down,
the sadness

Here, the sprawled body's exaggerated posture places the poet in contact with the earth's pleasant *suzushisa* 淋し ('coolness'), suggesting affection for the sensations of the phenomenal world. Yet the final five syllables take a surprising turn into sadness. Once again, Issa uses the exaggerated physical form to give the poem a sense of immediacy, complicated by an awareness of some greater emotional weight, one evoked by immediate sensation but implying a tension of opposition between the two points. Just as lying down in illness creates an unexpected tension between the prone body and its celestial perspective, the body reclined in pleasure evokes an emotional tension with an unknown source, perhaps one similar to the source of his guilt upon awakening from a midday nap to a farming song. This tension between the tactile present and its intangible psychological context is a hallmark of Issa's work. That tension is particularly powerful in the following *haikai*:

nesugata no hae ou mo kyo ga kagiri kana
寝姿の蠅追うも今日が限りかな
(*Issa Haikushū* 40)

shooing flies
from his sleeping form—even this
for the last time

This *haikai*, published in his collection, *Journal of my Father's Last Days,* (*Chichi no Shūen Nikki* 父の終焉日記), is an account of Issa's impending loss. His father, who had suddenly fallen ill, is lying in his deathbed. Waving flies from his father's sleeping figure, Issa reflects upon this gloomy, fruitless action with the final five syllables, *kagiri kana* 限りかな ('for the last time')[7]. The meaning of *kagiri* 限り ranges from "the most one can do," "the limit," to "the end." Here, it seems to encompass all those shades of meaning, as Issa does the most he can with his limited powers. At the same time, he is acutely aware of the finality of this gesture. Issa reflects on the deep significance of his prone father figure, juxtaposed with his own futile, utilitarian gesture, once again creating a space in which immediate physicality gains lasting psychological weight.

Journal of My Father's Last Days is regarded as one of Issa's less skillful journals, in which he is still discovering his own voice. For the most part, the journal inelegantly combines didactic classical allusions, graphic physical descriptions, and overwrought sentimentality (Huey 30). However amateur the work may be, it stands out in two ways. First, Issa's choice to focus the

[7] Scholar Robert Huey translates this phrase as "There's nothing more to do" (49).

work on the life of a farmer was unusual among serious poetic diaries, which tended to follow the life of elite figures. Second, his unusually explicit physical descriptions of his father's illness take post-Bashō conventional realism to another level, one which foreshadows Issa's increasing interest in embodiment as a strategy to emphasize the human simultaneously observing and participating in the phenomenal world. By applying realistic, embodied depictions to humans, Issa begins to cultivate his own sense of poetics, one that inverts the relationship between poetry and the phenomenal world, placing emphasis on the limited human, whose poetry speaks not to antiquity or a philosophy of nonattachment, but to the tactile sensations and emotional dilemmas of the daily world.

Issa's depictions of the prone body shed light on the social and spiritual implications of a body in motion. In certain *haikai*, such as *mottainaya* もったいなや ('this guilty feeling'), when Issa juxtaposes his body at rest to the bodies of farmers in motion, his poetic observation becomes a lament of poetry itself, an unproductive social role which holds lower value than that of the farmer.

In *haikai* depicting the nonprone human body, however, Issa often takes a lighter tone, emphasizing the subjective, embodied contemporary world over the classical past. Take, for example, a comparison of Issa and Buson, using *haikai* which incorporate the seasonal phrase *fuyugomori* 冬篭り ('winter retreat') *haikai*. In the following *haikai*, Buson links this seasonal retreat with an intimate connection to the literary past:

fuyugomori tōka ni shosu to kakaretari
冬篭り燈下に書すとかかれたり

(*Buson Haikushū* 132)

winter retreat—
penned under lamplight
it is written

Fuyugomori 冬篭り ('winter retreat') is a *waka* word which cues the reader to imagine a warm, indoor scene, tucked away from the snow-dark world outside. This *haikai*, written while Buson is bent over a classic text, reflects a nostalgic delight similar to the tone in his *oborozuki* 朧月 ('hazy moon') *haikai*. Upon reading the classical text's preface, he discovers it was written under lamplight, just as he is reading it in a warm interior beneath a circle of light. The reference to lamplight enhances the poem's sense of warmth, as the season's mounting cold gives way to an illuminated text which echoes with the commonalities between Buson's present and the aristocratic past.

Issa's "Winter retreat" 冬篭り *haikai* takes a strikingly different path:

hekurabe ga mata hajimaru zo fuyugomori
屁くらべが又始まるぞ冬篭

(*Issa Haikushū* 253)

the fart-off
begins again!
winter retreat

Though both *haikai* share a sense of habitual winter behaviors, Issa's is a deliberately

vulgar scene, given emphasis by the final exclamatory particle *zo*. By punctuating the vulgar human habits of the present, Issa advocates an antiromanticism that champions humans, in all their physicality, over elegant poetic diction. In *waka*, snow is a romanticized symbol of beauty, but having been raised in Shinano's harsh winters, Issa was more inclined to characterize snow with no trace of idealism. His willingness to sully the "high" poetic associations of snow is doubly reflected in the following, well-known *haikai*:

massuguna shōben ana ya mon no yuki
真直な小便穴や門の雪

(*Issa Haikushū* 316)

it makes a very straight hole—
pissing in the snow
outside my door

As he does in the *fuyugomori* 冬篭り ('winter retreat') *haikai*, Issa uses vulgarity and humor to recontextualize a conventional image of heightened beauty, placing the human in opposition to antiquity. However, beyond the humor of looking down as he mars the conventionally beautiful landscape, the *haikai* employs another perspectival shift that emphasizes the human over a context of "high" poetic diction. Just as he does in his prone-body *haikai*, Issa uses human physicality to direct the reader toward a different poetic perspective. Here, he uses the body's downward angling, emphasized by the straightness of the yellow hole, to empower the human body with agency in a poetic forum. Classical poetry, even that of Bashō and Buson, was often aimed at the marginalization of a tangible human presence, or the reduction of the human

perspective to a collective literary legacy stretching back to ancient Japan and China. By *shōben ana ya* 小便穴や ('pissing in the snow'), Issa empowers the limited, individual human perspective, giving it a power it could not have been afforded in the past.

However, not all of Issa's *haikai* involving the nonprone body utilize such extreme departures from classical themes. The following *haikai* employs a more subtle restructuring of poetic beauty, one without the insistent vulgarity of the two preceding *haikai*.

kuro tsuchi ya zōri no ura mo ume no hana
黒土やゾウリのうらも梅の花

(*Issa Haikushū* 142)

black earth—
even on my sandal bottoms
plum blossoms

The previous bears some resemblance to the following Buson *haikai*:

ikadashi no mino ya arashi no hanagoromo
筏士の蓑やあらしの花衣

(*Buson Haikushū* 42)

raftsman's raincoat
in the wind storm—
a flower kimono

Buson's *haikai* places a classic "high" poetic image, cherry blossoms, in a surprising, realistic new context, one which includes common folk. The raftsman is probably rowing goods downstream in the storm as flower viewers look on from beneath the blossoms. But as Buson

often does, even when he populates his poem with common people or contemporary scenes, he imbues them with exaggerated beauty. The ordinary raftsman is made gorgeous, marked by falling blossoms, which decorate his meager raincoat. Simultaneously, the blossoms, a classic *waka* symbol, are invigorated by an unexpected context, their beauty rediscovered in juxtaposition with the "low," mundane world.

Issa's *haikai* employs a similar image of fallen petals—plum blossoms—but his is not a *haikai* of heightened beauty. Instead of using the human figure as a revitalizing context for the petals, Issa uses the fallen blossoms to enhance the human context, as he lifts his foot to discover loose petals caught in the dark earth stuck to the bottom of his sandals. Just as he draws poetic attention to the prone body, he draws attention to the underside of the human foot, and the unexpected beauty to be found in neglected aspects of the human condition.

These *haikai* express different forms of the embodied human in opposition to poetic antiquity, a visible theme throughout Issa's work. In this chapter, I used close, comparative readings of Issa, Bashō, and Buson, in order to argue that Issa emphasizes the human as a physical being embedded in the phenomenal world. Conversely, Bashō and Buson tend to use allusion or symbolism in place of the human body, and when the body is physically present, its particular vulgarities go unnoticed. By depicting the explicit human body, I argue that Issa's work challenges the conventional balance of "high" and "low" diction in post-Bashō orthodoxy, offering a physical opposition to the conventional dominance of the "high." In the subsequent

section, I will explore humans as mental figures in Issa's work. Particularly, I will argue that Issa's depiction of humans as internally conflicted figures in tension with the contemporary and ancient worlds, he is again subverting the conventional balance of "high" and "low."

Mental Depiction

Though I have separated my analysis of physical and mental depictions into two sections, in practice, the relationship between the two is more porous. Particularly with physical depiction, Issa tends to incorporate or allude to mental states as well. However, for the sake of analytical clarity, I've chosen to interpret the physical and mental separately. Thus, for this section, I have selected poems which place greater emphasis on the mental state of humans, though Issa frequently employs both physical and psychological elements in the same *haikai*.

Issa's vulgar, perspective-shifting depictions of the human body differ from both pre-Bashō and post-Bashō orthodoxy in three ways. First, Issa's human body is more directly and explicitly depicted. Second, the body as a vulgar object is used not merely as humor, but to evoke a reevaluation of the vulgar world as a serious poetic subject (somewhat similar to Bashō's contemporaries in the Danrin school). Finally, rather than using the human body at the periphery of *haikai*, Issa places the human body at the center, relegating classic poetic symbolism to a supplementary role. Issa utilized the human body to recontextualize *haikai* as a human-centered endeavor.

Similarly, his mental depictions of human beings also differ from the precedents set by Bashō, and pre-Bashō *haikai* poets. First, Issa frequently creates poetic self-portraits. The frequency of his self-portraiture is unusual in comparison to his predecessors. Moreover, his self-depictions are subjective, fallible, and emotional, which differs significantly from Zen-influenced convention, which idealizes nonattachment to the phenomenal world and its physical and psychological illusions. Second, he depicts himself actively conflicted by spiritual, social, and artistic expectations. Third, Issa's internal tensions are less consoled by poetic legacies and ancient traditions, unlike poets like Bashō and Buson, who seemed to struggle less, and found their occasional struggles reconciled in an aesthetic-spiritual connectivity to a common literary legacy.

As previously mentioned, in its earliest manifestations, *haikai* was a purely comedic outlet in courtly society. But because the form achieved its humorous goal by lampooning classical poetic conventions, knowledge of Japan's literary legacy was necessary for a full appreciation of the purpose and pleasure of early *haikai*. Thus, even before *haikai* was considered a serious art form, it was still intrinsically defined by the conventions of ancient poetic tradition. Humor was not meant to challenge the hierarchy of poetic conventions, but to reinforce its significance.

Conversely, Issa harks back to literary predecessors with less frequency, and less acquiescence to conventional hierarchies. Take, for example, the following, which reflects the

dominance of Bashō's aesthetic in Issa's day:

sando kū tabi mottaina shiguregumo
三度くふ旅もったいな時雨雲

(*Issa Haikushū* 53)

wasteful, traveling
on three meals a day—
winter rain clouds

In the headnote to this *haikai*, Issa writes: "Today missing one meal was too much for me, and I felt hunger. Bashō must have subsisted on a single meal a day. How pitiful" (*Issa Haikushū* 53). Clearly, by this time, Bashō had come to be considered among the most admired "high" literary figures, and Issa was acutely aware of Bashō as a measure of his own poetic merit. The subsequent *haikai* shows Issa's typical self-effacement, and his subservient attitude toward Bashō's legacy fits conventional reverence for the poet. Because of the *haikai's* humble attitude and its clear reverence for literary legacy, exemplified in Bashō's asceticism, it may be argued that it is consistent with Issa's predecessors.

However, the difference is twofold. First, Issa does not emphasize Bashō, or connect him with other famous Japanese and Chinese poet-monks. Rather than using the *haikai* as a forum for praising Bashō's acetic commitment to poetic excellence, and connecting it to a long line of other venerable poets, Issa's focuses on is his own comparative gluttony. By making his ambivalent relationship with Bashō's legacy the poem's center, Issa paints a subjective psychological self-portrait, clearly distinguishing him from his literary past. By referencing Bashō,

Issa connects himself to a legacy of poor, traveling poets. But where his predecessors commonly diffuse the individual poet's significance into a long history of great works and figures, with no single perspective taking precedence, Issa emphasizes his limited, contemporary perspective by referencing the mythology of Bashō's asceticism. This subjective, contemporary poet is aware of, but unable to join, the ranks of the literary past. This degree of personal tension with "high" literary antiquity is a significant departure from the conventional poet's relationship with celebrated works and figures.

As Issa matured as a poet, he increasingly turned to subjective, emotional self-portraiture as a means to challenge poetic conventions. Take, for example, the opening prose and *haibun* passages from his most famous journal, *Spring of My Life* (*Ora ga Haru* おらが春). The journal begins with an account of a devout priest who, vowing to celebrate New Year to the fullest, wrote himself a letter—to be delivered the following morning by a novice—which read: "Give up the world of suffering! Come to the Pure Land. I will meet you along the way with a host of bodhisattvas!" (Hamill 1). Upon reading the words, the priest began to cry until his sleeves were soaked. The story, Issa writes:

> …may at a glance seem terribly strange. After all, who would want to celebrate New Year's Day in sleeves soaked with tears, tears that were self-induced? Nevertheless, the priest's way was righteous: his principal duty was to bring the Buddha's teaching to this world. What better way to celebrate New Year's Day (Hamill 1).

The priest's story serves to give Issa's own New Year celebration context, as he claims a

kinship with the tearful priest in the following *haibun*:

> Still clothed in the dust of this suffering world, I celebrate the first day in my own way. And yet I am like the priest, for I too shun trite popular seasonal congratulations. The commonplace "crane" and "tortoise" echo like empty words, like the actors who come begging on New Year's Eve with empty wishes for prosperity. The customary New Year's pine will not stand beside my door. I won't even sweep my dusty house, living as I do in a tiny hermitage constantly threatening to collapse under harsh north winds. I'll leave it all to Buddha, as in the ancient story.
> The way ahead may be dangerous, steep as snowy trails winding through high mountains. Nevertheless, I welcome the New Year just as I am.

medetasamo	目出度さも	New Year's Day
chū gurai nari	ちう位也	I feel ordinary—
ora ga haru	おらが春	spring of my life

(Hamill 2)

By expressing dissatisfaction with celebratory symbols of New Year's Day, Issa is not rejecting the social rituals that mark the passage of time. Rather, he is dissatisfied with prescribed responses to the passage of seasons, a vital, defining component of *haikai,* and a crucial element to Zen-influenced emphasis on the ephemeral. Issa challenges those long-held elite prescriptions. The first five syllables, *medetasamo 目出度さも* ('New Year's Day'), establish an expectation that the *haikai* will offer some variation of New Year's Day prescriptions. However, the middle seven syllables, *chū gurai nari ちう位也* ('I feel ordinary'), is neither celebratory nor sorrowful, but willfully ordinary. The final line further emphasizes his individual, commonplace way of celebrating: *ora ga haru おらが春* ('spring of my life'). The phrase is a play on the more common *kimi ga haru 君が春*, a New Year's exaltation of the emperor (NKD v. 6.40). Here,

however, rather than greeting the emperor, or the New Year, with exaltation, Issa wryly celebrates his own base, contemporary existence, clothed as he is in "the dust of this suffering world." This passage gives a glimpse of Issa's developing poetics, steeped in the dust of the phenomenal world, rather than merely observing it pass, as his predecessors did.

Issa's poetic relationship with the phenomenal world is strikingly different from conventional poets, due in large part to his Pure Land beliefs. This spiritual difference results in a poetics that emphasizes a vulnerable, limited human perspective, based heavily in the world of contemporary experience. Take, for example, the following, well-known *haikai* from *Spring of My Life*, translated by Ueda. It follows an account of the death of Issa's infant daughter, Sato:

> I tried to put on a resigned look, since I knew that flowing water never comes back upstream, that fallen blossoms never return to the tree. Still, I just could not cut the binding cord of affection.

tsuyu no yo wa	露の世は	this world of dew
tsuyu no yo nagara	露の世ながら	is only a world of dew
sarinagara	さりながら	and yet…and yet…

(Ueda 125)

The phrase *tsuyu no yo* 露の世 ('world of dew') is a Buddhist reference to the transience of the phenomenal world. Zen-influenced poets wrote toward nonattachment to this world, sometimes favoring the heightened aestheticism of poetry as a means of separating oneself, as Buson did, and sometimes using poetry in some combination of aestheticism and spiritual practice toward nonattachment, as Bashō did.

Issa, like Bashō, seemed to view poetry as both an aesthetic and spiritual practice, but unlike Bashō, Issa did not write toward nonattachment. In the previous *haikai*, though he acknowledges the transience of the phenomenal world, Issa's final, trailing line speaks to a deep emotional attachment to that passing world. This recurring conflict creates a complex, subjective psychological self-portrait of the poet Issa.

This conflicted self-portrait is often interpreted by scholars through a biographical lens, as an inevitable result of the many sorrows Issa endured throughout his life. However, Issa's hand is clear in the construction of this self-portrait as a spiritually-influenced aesthetic, rather than a mere transcription of life events.

In fact, though the *tsuyu no yo* 露の世 ('world of dew') *haikai* follows Issa's account of his daughter's death in *Spring of My Life*, scholars note that it was composed earlier, after the death of his firstborn son (Hamill xv). Issa's use of this poem, written for a different occasion, to create a conflicted psychological self-portrait, speaks to his willingness to manipulate real life events to achieve a more affecting artistic picture. This flexible habit of reusing or recontextualizing *haikai* for aesthetic purposes undermines the notion that Issa's work is a natural outgrowth of biographical experience. Rather, Issa utilizes events from his life as tools to cultivate an aesthetic distinct from that of his predecessors.

Issa wrote frequently about the death that plagued his family life, but he also wrote about psychological conflicts between himself and living members of his community, particularly during

his twelve-year inheritance struggle. Take the following *haikai*, in which Issa utilizes nature to represent human conflict:

furusato ya yorumo sawarumo bara no hana
故郷やよるも触もバラの花

(*Issa Haikushū* 131)

my hometown—
all I approach, all I touch,
flowers of the thorn

The *haikai* was written in June 1810, when Issa suddenly returned to Kashiwabara in order to persuade his estranged mother and half-brother to quickly resolve their inheritance dispute. Found in *The Seventh Diary* (*Shichiban Nikki* 七番日記), it is preceded by this passage: "I met with the village headman and other villagers, then stopped by my old home. As I had predicted to myself the day before, they did not offer even a cup of boiled water. I took leave in a hurry" (Ueda 67). The short vowel sounds of the seven-syllable line, *yorumo sawarumo* よるも触も ('all I approach, all I touch—'), give the *haikai* a rhythmic momentum that amplifies the impression of Issa's approach as he reaches out to touch upon his hometown. His anthropomorphic turn in the final line, *bara no hana* バラの花 ('flowers of the thorn'), utilizes the stark natural contrast between the flower's allure and its sharp thorns, maintaining a tension between beauty and pain. Issa centralizes the limited human perspective, fraught with psychological conflict, while the flower becomes a poignant proxy for the human condition. This *haikai* demonstrates yet another deviation from post-Bashō orthodoxy, with its passing observations of the ephemeral world. Instead, Issa writes from within the "world of dew,"

where human conundrums have the power to allure and detain the subjective, limited poet.

Even in less heightened circumstances, Issa's *haikai* tend to remind readers of the persistence of psychological conflict. Take, for example, this physical and psychological self-portrait:

hikime ni mite sae samuki atama kana
ひいき目に見てさへ寒きアタマ哉

(*Issa Haikushū* 282)

even with kind eyes
this head looks
bald and chilly

This *haikai* bears some similarity to Bashō's sickly self-portrait, quoted earlier, but in another nod to internal human conflict, Issa emphasizes his attempt to extend generous eyes toward his own aging visage. The futility of his self-generosity, emphasized by the middle line's use of the word *sae*—which I've shifted to the opening line in and translated as "even"—once again brings the reader to a fundamental tension in the human condition. Even as Issa recognizes the inevitability of aging and death, he finds himself struggling against it, viewing himself from a kinder, but still limited, perspective. Rather than dissipating his visible vulnerability by juxtaposing it with the cyclical summer rains, as Bashō does, Issa juxtaposes the visible face with the wry, wistful interior.

In another emphasis on the phenomenally bound human perspective, Issa lends a personal subjectivity to a familiar seasonal phrase, *ama no gawa* 天の川, sometimes translated as "Milky Way," though to avoid cultural over-writing, I have translated it here as "River of Stars."

An autumn *kigo* 季語 ('seasonal word'), this phrase is a reference to the *Tanabata*[8] 七夕 ('Star Festival'). The connotations of *ama no gawa* 天の川 ('River of Stars') suggest a mythical poetic scope, but Issa's *haikai* takes an unexpected turn:

hitorinawa waga hoshi naran ama no gawa
ひとりなは我星ならん天の川

(*Issa Haikushū* 43)

that solitary one
must be mine—
River of Stars

Both *hoshi* 星 ('star') and *ama no gawa* 天の川 ('River of Stars') are *waka* words, but Issa places their high literary significance in a singular human context. The emphasis on solitude and individuality found in *hitori* ひとり ('solitary') and *waga hoshi* 我星 ('mine [star]'), refigures the seasonal moment. Rather than emphasizing the bittersweet meeting of two mythical beings, Issa uses Tanabata's rich associations to give weight to his own subjectivity. Playing off the poetic connotations of vast, celestial bodies, Issa amplifies his singular human gaze.

In another striking example of this juxtaposition of the human and the celestial, Issa writes of the moon in the following:

yamazato ha shiru no naka made meigetsu zo
山里は汁の中まで名月ぞ

(*Issa Haikushū* 188)

[8] Inspired by Chinese folklore, *Tanabata* is a summer festival honoring two celestial lovers separated by the Milky Way. According to legend, the lovers meet only once a year, on the seventh day of the seventh month.

mountain village—
inside the soup bowl
a harvest moon

This autumn *haikai* recontextualizes the moon's vast poetic conventions, placing its bright, familiar shape inside a bowl of soup. Thus, the poetic and natural worlds are contained within a human perspective. Here, the moon gains an acute intimacy, for it is likely being lifted to the lips for a drink.[9] The poet, seeking nourishment, gains it in two forms, the soup's body-sustaining nourishment, and the moon's deep psychological power. That moon, deeply admired, is then consumed by the body, as the poet retains the moment's surprising pleasures, the coolness of the moon in the soup's warmth. The opening line echoes a famous poem from the *Hyakunin Isshu* 百人一集:

yamazato wa fuyu zo sabishisa masarikeru hitome mo kusa mo karenu to omoeba
山里は冬ぞ寂しさまさりける人目も草もかれぬと思へば
(Benesse 1264)

mountain village—
winter's sadness
is greatest when
visitors and grasses
wither away

The poem emphasizes the sadness of winter in a small village, which is marked by two parallel movements, the retreat of visitors and the withering of grass. The social movements of this mountain village echo the greater rhythms of nature, and the loneliness, though acute, seems

[9] I am grateful to Professor Yukio Kachi for helping me elucidate this point.

fitting in this cold winter season. Conversely, Issa's autumn poem filters nature through a human context, containing the moon's reflection within a bowl of soup, made by and for people inhabiting the humble village. It bears some resemblance to Buson's *ikadashino* 筏士の ('raftsman's') *haikai*, cited earlier, though the difference is clear. In Buson's poem, the raftsman is remade by fallen blossoms in a windstorm, elevated from his ordinary life. In Issa's *yamazatoya* 山里や ('mountain village'), on the other hand, the man-made soup holds the moon's reflection within the lip of its bowl, refiguring the celestial body in a human light. A similar *haikai*, from Bashō, further illustrates Issa's distinct poetic strategy:

ko no moto ni shiru mo namasu mo sakura kana
木のもとに汁も膾も桜かな

(*Bashō Haikshū* 212)

beneath the trees
even soup, even fish salad—
cherry blossoms!

With this poem, Bashō revitalizes the conventional cherry blossom by scattering the petals among flower viewers, who enjoy soup and vinegared fish beneath the branches. The repetition of the particle *mo* in the middle line gives the poem momentum, propelling it into the newly invigorated cherry blossom. Both Bashō and Issa juxtapose images of heightened poetic beauty—cherry blossoms and the moon, respectively—with a simpler, more commonplace image of soup, but the difference is a matter of balance. Like Buson's, Bashō's *haikai* scatters poetic convention across a mundane scene, reiterating the delicate, and somehow indelible cherry

blossom. Issa, on the other hand, inverts this movement, submersing the harvest moon in the soup, so that it can only be seen shifting within the social rituals which accompany its autumn appearance. In Bashō and Buson's work, the human accentuates the beauty of nature. In Issa's work, nature accentuates the human condition.

This is not to say that Issa's poetic treatment of the natural world is strictly utilitarian. In fact, his reception as a "humanist" poet encompasses both the human and natural worlds. Issa was famous for his affection for small creatures, and when his deep involvement with the human world threatened to overwhelm his work, he frequently turned to nature for poetic sympathy. Take, for example, the following *haikai*:

yasegaeru makeruna Issa kore ni ari
痩蛙まけるな一茶是に有

(*Issa Haikushū* 243)

skinny frog
don't give up!
Issa is here

This *haikai* exemplifies Issa's subjective self-portraiture in relation to nature. The natural poems of Bashō and Buson are full of keen observations and delight at the aesthetic pleasures found in flora and fauna, but there is no particular emphasis on the poet as either observer or participant. Neither poet expresses Issa's level of emotional investment in observations of the natural world. The only *haikai* that approaches Issa's level of sympathy is the following, from Bashō:

michinobe no mukuge wa ma ni kuwarekeri
道のべの槿は馬にくわれけり

(*Bashō Haikushū* 61)

roadside
rose of Sharon, eaten
by my horse

Here, Bashō is actively involved with the natural scene. Composed on horseback, the *haikai* evokes Bashō's admiration for the rose, as his poetic gaze is trained on its simple, roadside beauty. His reverie is broken by the horse as it eats the object of admiration, surprising Bashō with yet another unexpected pleasure of the natural world. However involved Bashō may be in the action, he still maintains a measure of emotional distance, never taking sides with either the horse or the rose.

Conversely, Issa's *yasegaeru* 痩蛙 ('skinny frog') poem clearly plays favorites. Issa sympathizes with the skinny frog's unfortunate disadvantage in the natural world. So deep is his sympathy that he declares an allegiance, and the poem reflects a kind of poetic brandishing on the frog's behalf. This level of personal investment transgresses the conventional poet's status as observer of nature. Instead, Issa's poet becomes a warrior for nature's most downtrodden. This relationship between poet and nature is one more facet of Issa's poetics of opposition. Entrenched in the phenomenal world, Issa's poetic relationship with nature cannot maintain the distance demanded by convention, just as his relationship with the human mind and body cannot be satisfied by peripheral and symbolic depiction.

Similarly, in the following *haikai*, Issa offers comfort to creatures of the natural world:

neru cho ni kashite oku zo yo hizagashira
寝るてふにかしておくぞよ膝がしら
(*Issa Haikushū* 180)

sleeping butterfly,
I lend you
the top my knee

This declaration is explicitly physical, unlike the *yasegaeru* 痩蛙 ('skinny frog') poem, which suggested physical assistance, stemming from deep psychological sympathy. Here, Issa depicts the butterfly, a "high" literary symbol, as a creature that, like humans, is also a body in need of rest. Like Issa's prone-body *haikai,* this poem firmly grounds the poetic eye in a human body in contact with the natural world. Not merely an observer, Issa and the butterfly become companions at rest. Their poetic merit is not contingent upon knowledge of a literary legacy, but on an ability to draw upon subjective experiences with the natural world.

In addition to expressing sympathy for creatures of the natural world, he also depicts an anthropomorphic relationship, placing his human burdens on small creatures of the natural world. A poet who wrote openly about the early loss of his biological mother, Issa alludes to a similar sense of loss in this sparrow:

ore to kite asobu ya oya no nai suzume
我と来て遊ぶや親のない雀
(*Issa Haikushū* 208)

come and
play with me,
motherless sparrow

Rather than relying upon the reader's familiarity with the literary past, this poem relies upon the reader's familiarity with Issa's personal past. The sparrow's poetic charm is entwined with the reader's investment in Issa's poetry of human loss. These twin sympathies require no special scholarly background, only an appreciation for the human condition, and its parallels in the natural world.

The natural world is not always a source of comfort and sympathy, however. In keeping with Issa's poetics of embodiment, the poet who is physically and psychologically invested in the phenomenal world sometimes feels a sense of hostility and isolation from that world. The *haikai* cited below, written during the height of inheritance tensions between Issa and his in-laws, reflects such an entrenchment:

kari goya goya ore ga uwasa wo itasu kana
雁ごやごやおれがうわさをいたすかな
(*Issa Haikushū* 170)

the geese honk honking
spreading rumors
about me

Issa's internal conflict is such that, in a rare instance, even the natural world provides only rumor and judgment. The abrasive geese calls grate on Issa's nerves, just as hostile relatives and townsfolk try his patience. Clearly, Issa is anthropomorphizing the geese, deflecting his

frustration with his in-laws and the Kashiwabara villagers, who treat him coldly, and who he is certain are speaking badly of him. It is interesting to note, however, that in this *haikai*, Issa uses the honorific *itasu*, which gives the offending geese a higher status than Issa himself. By addressing the geese honorifically, Issa may be alluding to the geese as symbols of "high" poetic diction. Like the frog, in *waka,* the goose is commonly associated with its call as a symbol of sadness. The following poem, from the Gozen Waka Collection (*Gozen Wakashū* 後撰和歌集), expressing this sentiment:

> *aki goto ni kuredo kaereba tanomanu wo koe ni tate tsutsu kari to nomi naki*
> 秋毎にくれど帰れば頼まぬを声にたてつつかりとのみ鳴く
> (*Nippon Kokugo Daijiten* 5.218)

with each autumn
darkening, he leaves—
without faith
I cry for this parting
with only the geese's voice

This verse expresses the sadness of parting from a lover, with only the lonely call of geese to comfort the poet, who is also crying out. But instead of associating the geese's call with romantic longing, Issa cringes at the sound, contemplating the abrasiveness of the avian bray, a perfect echo of humanity's petty rivalries. Issa takes a classic *waka* word and challenges its essential implications. Instead of depicting geese with the high romanticism of the past, he plays upon the sense of sadness and isolation in a contemporary context. The power of geese as a classic symbol is leveraged to give power to a contemporary scene, one in which the human's

contemporary conflicts are not comforted by allusions to the past, but further exacerbated. Once again, Issa places "high" symbolism and contemporary human subjectivity in opposition, placing poetic emphasis on the latter.

Throughout the previous examples, Issa depicts the human as a subjective presence deeply invested in the human and natural world. That psychological investment is often characterized by tension or conflict, particularly in regard to contemporary human society and ancient literary precedent. More often, Issa depicts the natural world as an emotional balm to the troubles of the human world, though this is not always the case. Either way, Issa depicts the human as embedded in the phenomenal world. As a limited being incapable of or reluctant to reject the emotional highs and lows of the life, Issa's human is necessarily a champion of "low" poetic diction, a challenge to Bashō's emphasis on revitalizing the past with innovations from the present.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

Throughout this thesis, I have used close, comparative readings to argue that Issa's work constitutes a poetics of opposition. This poetics has two major components. The first is that of physical depiction. By making the implied human body explicit, exaggerated, or vulgar, Issa challenges the conventional role of human figures in post-Bashō *haikai*. Where the human presence is conventionally implicit or symbolic in *haikai* orthodoxy, it is directly and centrally depicted in Issa's work, with an emphasis on the sensory experiences of the phenomenal world, rather than a longing for nonattachment.

The second major aspect of Issa's poetics of opposition is that of mental depiction. Whether in relation to the contemporary human world, the world of nature, or the world of high antiquity, Issa depicts humans as emotionally invested in and conflicted by the phenomenal world. Moreover, Issa depicts himself as a subjective individual, distinct from his literary predecessors. Though he is aware of his literary past, he does not feel a sense of camaraderie or commonality with those classic figures. Instead, he emphasizes his own sense of ambivalence for or isolation from conventional poetics. Though he, like his predecessors, is aware of the transient

and illusory nature of the phenomenal world, he is drawn to its vulgar forms, and cultivates an aesthetic that features the "low" as neither a wholly comic nor pragmatic complement to high antiquity. Instead, it is its own purpose, both serious and embodied in the limited, contemporary experience.

Issa's poetry follows post-Bashō structural expectations, utilizing both "high" and "low" diction, including a seasonal word, and following the 5-7-5 verse pattern. Unlike Bashō, however, Issa did not use antiquity as *haikai*'s spiritual and philosophical foundation. Instead, he challenges the conventional balance of "high" and "low" diction, pushing high literary culture to the periphery. In its place, he utilizes the phenomenal world, with its rich physical and psychological qualities, as the spiritual and philosophical foundation of his serious, but comparatively "vulgar" *haikai*.

This more nuanced theory of Issa's poetics provides two key benefits. First, it challenges a common misconception that Issa's is a "modern" aesthetic. Though many scholars seem to equate Issa's emphasis on vulgarity as a characteristic of modern literature, it is in fact a part of *haikai's* earliest forms, and has no inherent relationship with modernity. Second, by placing a nuanced theory of Issa's poetics in the larger context of *haikai* development, we may come to understand that the use of humor and vulgarity may in fact be used effectively in *haikai* to achieve a serious, literary voice. Issa's emphasis on "low" diction was not merely a return to the purely comical roots of *haikai no renga*. Instead, Issa followed Bashō's efforts to elevate *haikai*

to a serious literary form. However, rather than aiming for Bashō's poetic ideal of "awakening to the high, returning to the low," Issa implicitly argued for a different ideal, one which championed the "low" diction of the phenomenal world as *haikai*'s spiritual and philosophical foundation. This is not to say that Issa rejected literary precedent altogether. Issa frequently utilizes "high" poetic diction, but he does so in a peripheral sense. Displacing "the ancients" from *haikai*'s center, Issa replaces them with a subjective, contemporary voice, a voice embedded in the phenomenal world, thus embodied by its physical and mental qualities.

Both Issa's value and marginality in the Japanese canon are rooted in his poetics of opposition. Because he speaks directly to his great literary predecessors, his work shares a fundamental investment in literary legacy. Yet Issa's poetry exists willfully in the phenomenal world, placing legacy at the periphery. Unlike the genre's other pillars, Bashō and Buson, Issa emphasizes the poetic revelations that arise out of limitation, rather than an attempt to overcome the individual or historical moment. This distinction is an important one to be made with regard to Issa, as it challenges simplistic biographical readings of his work. Given Issa's ubiquity as a figure of literary significance, it seems necessary to analyze his work as something more than a natural outgrowth of his life's events. By proposing a poetics of opposition, I hope to contribute text-based, aesthetic understanding of Issa to the field of *haiku* scholarship.

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